

Gaines ready to tackle budget, higher ed, building codes

By Kathryn Reed

Change the requirement mandating new residential construction come with sprinklers and create a setting so those who want to graduate in four years from the CSU system can.

Those are two pieces of legislation state Sen. Ted Gaines plans to introduce this session.

Gaines, who represented Lake Tahoe in the state Assembly for four years, was elected to the state Senate last week and sworn in Jan. 6. The Republican from Roseville was still settling into his Sacramento office when *Lake Tahoe News* caught with him by phone this week.



Ted Gaines

One of the major differences between the seats is the size of the district. The Assembly position covered four counties, the Senate 12. Gaines represents people on the Oregon border in Modoc County down to Mammoth Mountain in Mono County.

Despite the increase in territory, he plans to reach out to visit his constituents as much as he can. In the spring he expects to start setting up a series of meetings throughout his district, including Tahoe.

“As far as I’m concerned, I’m going to be just as active and accessible to everyone,” Gaines said in reference to any apprehension after last weekend’s deadly shooting in Arizona. “The state of California is reviewing their policies. They are briefing us legislators as far as proper procedures for having public forums. I will heed that advice, but it won’t prevent me from making sure I communicate with my constituents.”

Tahoe concerns

Gaines has a second home on the North Shore, so he is in a more unique situation than some elected officials to know firsthand what life in Tahoe is like – even if it’s part time knowledge.

He plans to keep an eye on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to ensure “they are operating in a transparent fashion so special interests are not influencing their decision-making.”

Having TRPA Governing Board meetings accessible on the web with audio and visual components is something Gaines is pushing for.

“I think what is becoming more and more clear is that economic development is good for Lake Tahoe. When you put new infrastructure in at the lake it improves the health of the lake if done right,” Gaines said. “We would want individuals serving on the TRPA to help the local economy while at the same time preserving the lake.”

Gaines is going to seek revisions to the state building codes that took effect Jan. 1 which call for sprinklers in all new residential construction. Until this month the need for sprinklers was triggered based on square footage.

Research is being done to determine if he’ll seek to repeal the legislation, create different standards for construction at sea level v. elevations like Tahoe, or delay implementation.

In 2009 a woman in Truckee died when the sprinklers in her home were triggered by smoke from cooking. The glycerin in the sprinklers mixed with the flames from the stove and caused the fatal explosion.

Statewide issues

Even though a Democrat is in the governor's office, the Republican state Senator is optimistic change is coming.

"I've had three meetings with him in the last 30 days," Gaines said of Gov. Jerry Brown. "I credit him for being engaged and wanting to help solve California's problems."

However, he disagrees with the governor's idea to extend tax increases that went into affect two years ago. Voters may decide this in June.

"It's an extension of taxes that didn't exist two years ago," Gaines said, explaining why he calls the governor's proposal a tax hike.

Gaines in his years in the Assembly voted against all the budgets "because none was balanced."

Gaines understands people don't trust government. He is sure citizens don't understand what they are getting in a budget that was \$58 billion in 1997 and nearly doubled a decade later.

He looks at items in the budget that didn't exist eight or 10 years ago and questions why. The senator points to in-home support services as a line item that keeps growing.

"I'm not sure what the state obligation is to care for families. That is a family obligation," Gaines said.

He wants to pursue public-private partnerships wherever possible.

“We need to eliminate programs that are not essential,” Gaines said. “The programs that are essential need to run in a more efficient manner.”

He wants to create a better business climate, to do away with agencies that bicker with one another.

Gaines points to British Columbia, Canada, which eliminated 160,000 regulations over two years and has not suffered a recession. He thinks California could learn a thing or two from its neighbors to the north to make for a better climate for businesses.

Looking at investment tax credits for businesses wanting to invest in the state would also help create a better climate, he said. This in turn would help to spur job growth. (The state unemployment rate for November was 12.4 percent, while it topped 17 percent in South Lake Tahoe.)

When it comes to higher education Gaines is fed up students are not able to graduate in four years because the classes are not offered. He wants to revamp the number of electives needed to graduate to help students move through the system.

Gaines wants to create more water storage for California, citing how the population has more than doubled since the reservoir system was established. He wants to find a solution for the problems with the Delta. One thing he adamantly opposes is the \$11 billion water bond that is supposed to be on a ballot in 2012.

Committee assignments for lawmakers will likely come out next week, so what specialty areas Gaines will be working on remains to be seen.

Filling Assembly seat

Candidates will compete in a March 8 primary to fill Gaines' former Assembly seat. If no one gets more than 50 percent, the

top two vote-getters – regardless of party – will be in a May 3 runoff.

People have until Jan. 24 to declare their candidacy.

Running so far on the Republican side are Gaines' wife, Beth; Michael Babich of Auburn; and Mike O'Connor of Lincoln.

Dennis Campanale of Placer County is the lone Democrat in the race.